AUSSIE BITES

The Bugalugs Bum Thief

Tim Winton

Illustrated by Stephen Michael King

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Aussie Bites

The Bugalugs Bum Thief

Skeeta Anderson woke up one morning to find that his bum was gone. And not only *his* bum, but the bum of every single person in the town of Bugalugs.

It's up to Skeeta to catch the thief . . .

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The Bugalugs Bum Thief

Tim Winton

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For Jesse, Harry and Alice *T.W.*

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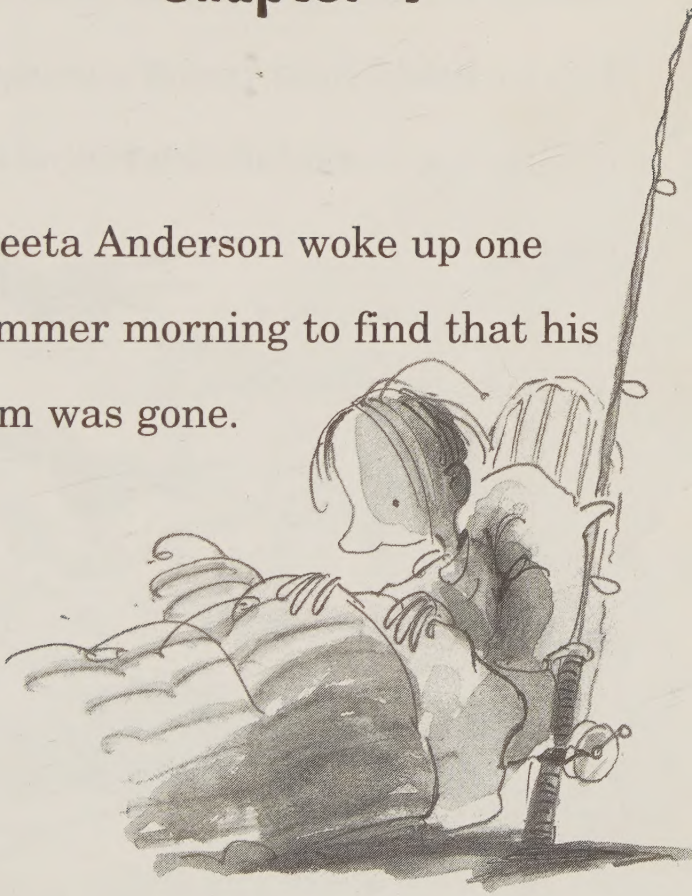
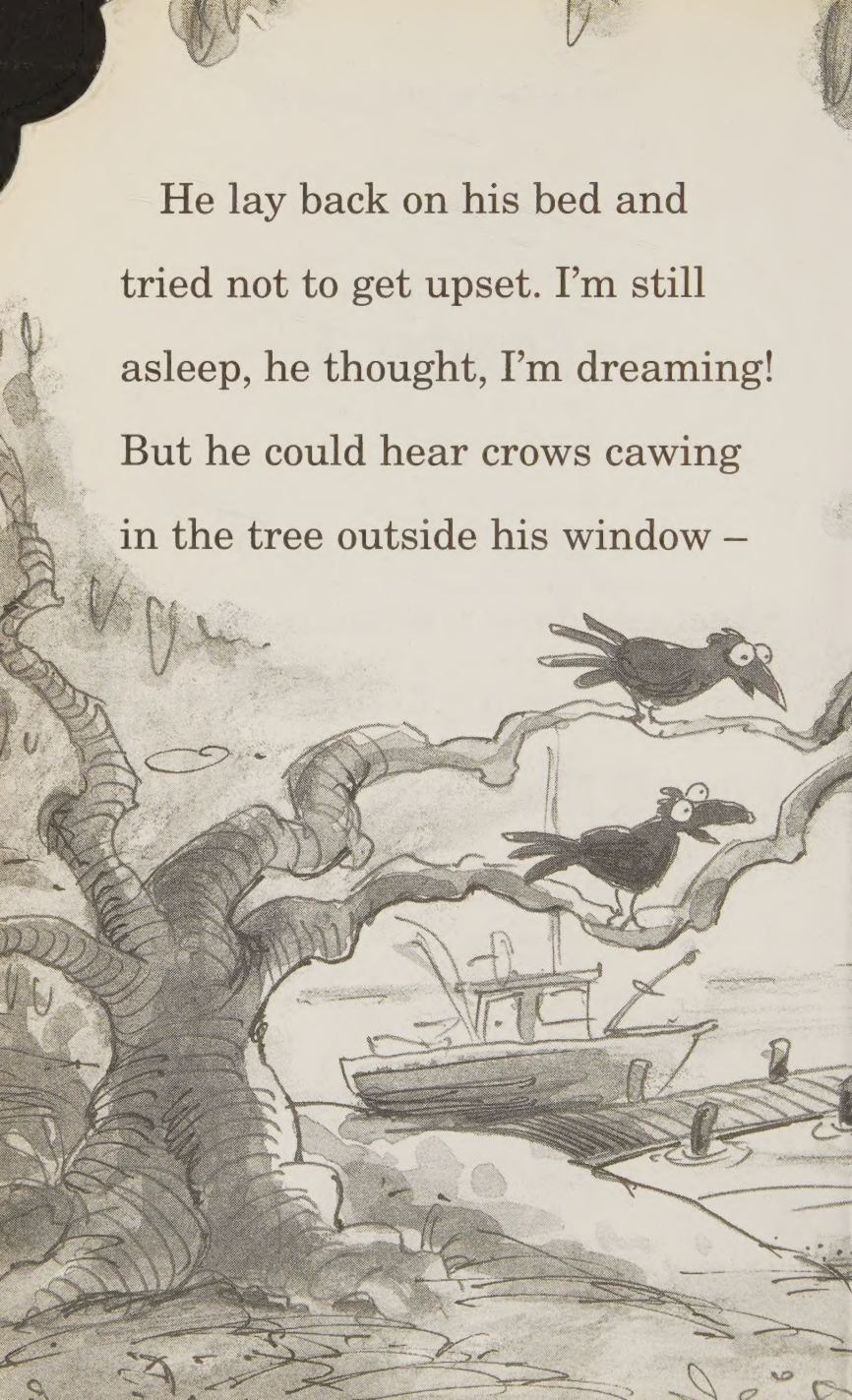
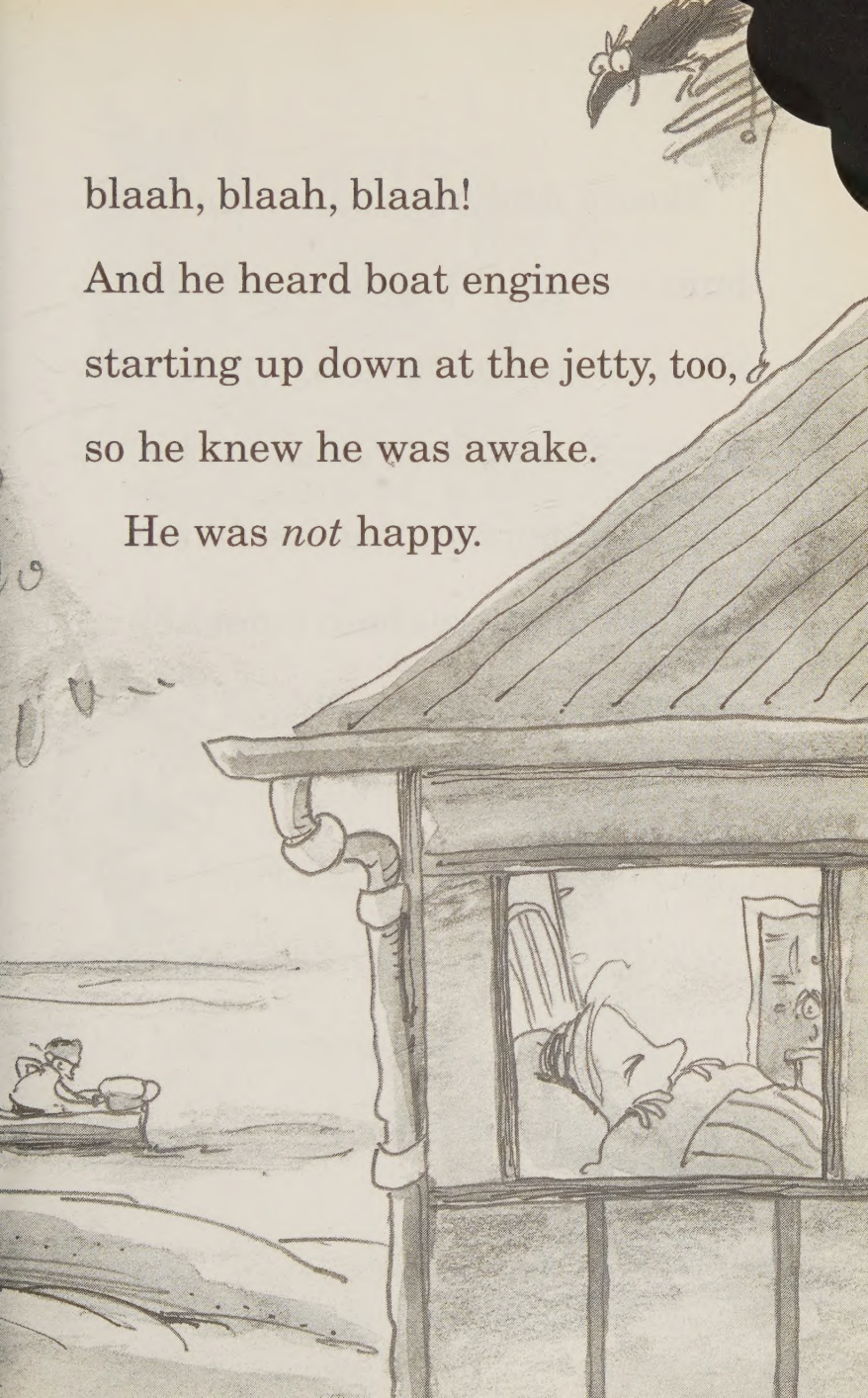
Chapter 1

Skeeta Anderson woke up one summer morning to find that his bum was gone.



He lay back on his bed and tried not to get upset. I'm still asleep, he thought, I'm dreaming! But he could hear crows cawing in the tree outside his window –





blaah, blaah, blaah!

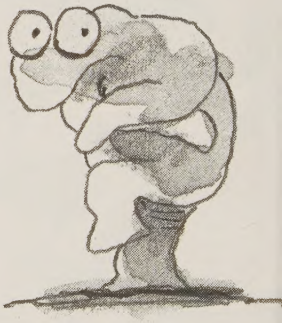
And he heard boat engines

starting up down at the jetty, too,

so he knew he was awake.

He was *not* happy.

Skeeta Anderson knew that his bum was gone because, as any sensible person knows, a missing bum makes a large dent in the back of a person. You feel like a turtle without a shell, a donkey without a tail.



There were other clues, too. When Skeeta sat on the edge of his bed, he slid straight to the floor. Nothing to sit on! Walking from his bedroom to the kitchen he lost his pyjama pants – there was nothing to hold them up!

'Mum!' he called, 'Dad!
Something terrible –'

He stopped and stared. His mum and dad were eating breakfast on the floor.

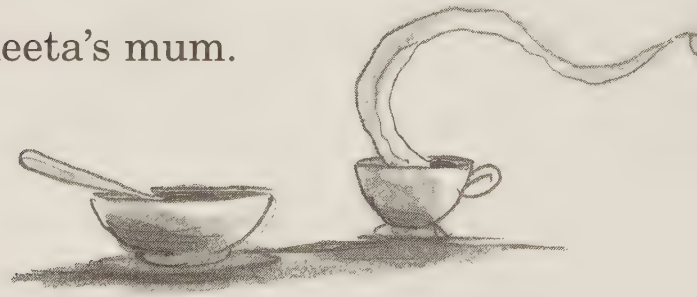
'Morning, Skeet,' said his mum.

Skeeta's mouth dropped open like a truck door.

'Ahem,' said Skeeta's dad,
sounding very embarrassed.
'We seem to have lost our bottoms
in the night. Finding it hard to
sit on our chairs. Useful thing,
a bottom, when you think of it.'

Skeeta's parents went on eating their toast and drinking their tea.

'Don't be late for school,' said Skeeta's mum.

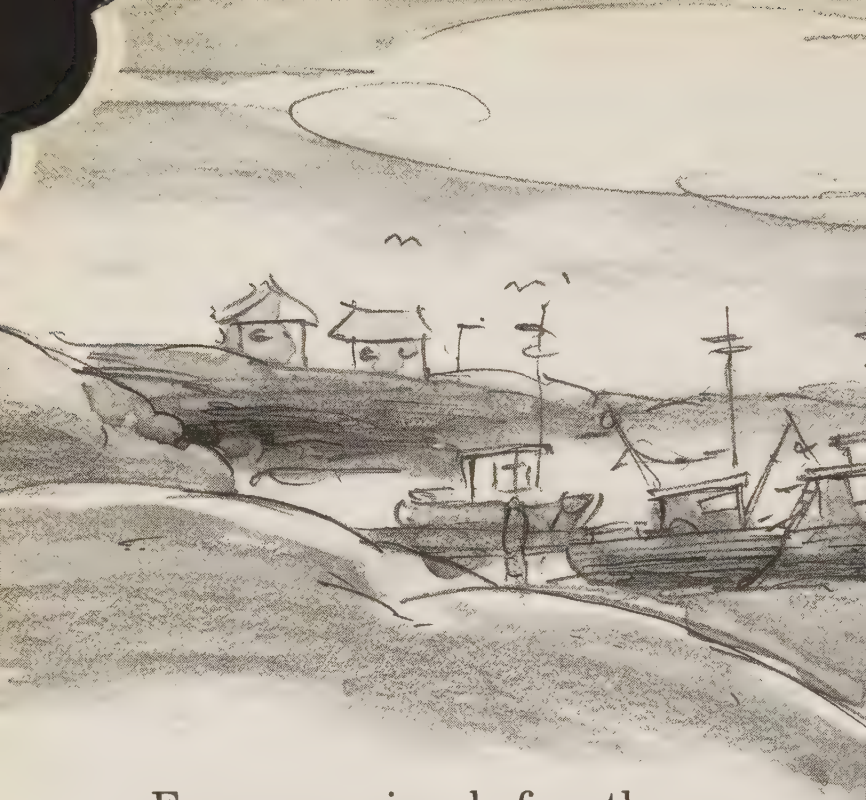


Chapter 2

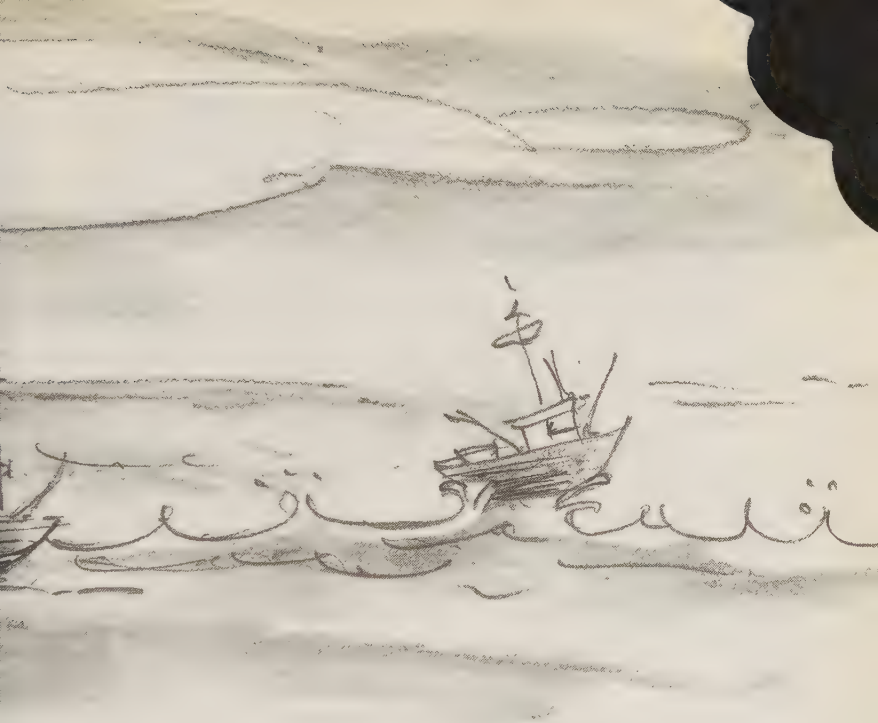
Skeeta lived in a small town by the sea. The town was called Bugalugs. No one could remember who was to blame for thinking up such a dumb name for a town, and even if they *could* remember, no one was going to own up to it.

Because the people of Bugalugs were a bit proud. They were nice folks, but just a teeny bit vain.

Bugalugs was three streets wide and was built next to a beautiful bay where fishing boats anchored. Behind the town was a great desert of white dunes.



Every morning, before the sun came up over the dunes, the fishermen of Bugalugs went out to catch crayfish. They put fresh bait in their traps every day and



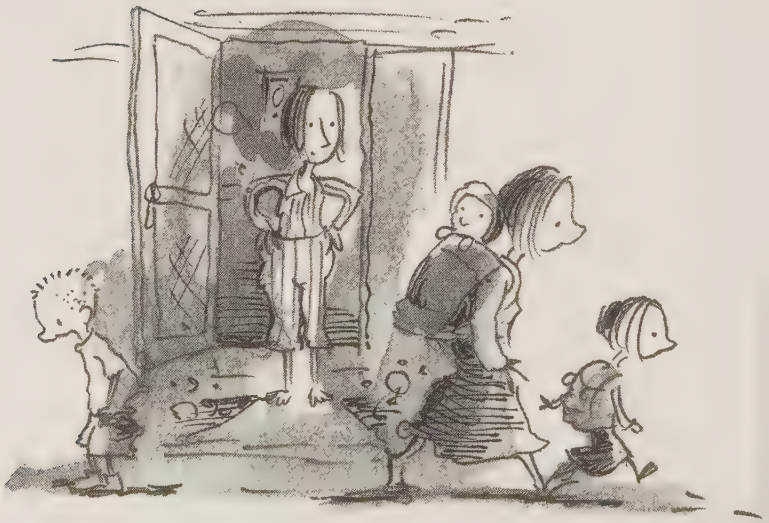
the little red critters made gutses of themselves. As all sensible people know, a cray will eat anything except football boots, so bait is not hard to find.

Every day crayfish were pulled from the traps, still munching, and were sent all over the world so people could munch on *them*. That's how it was every day at Bugalugs.

Except today.

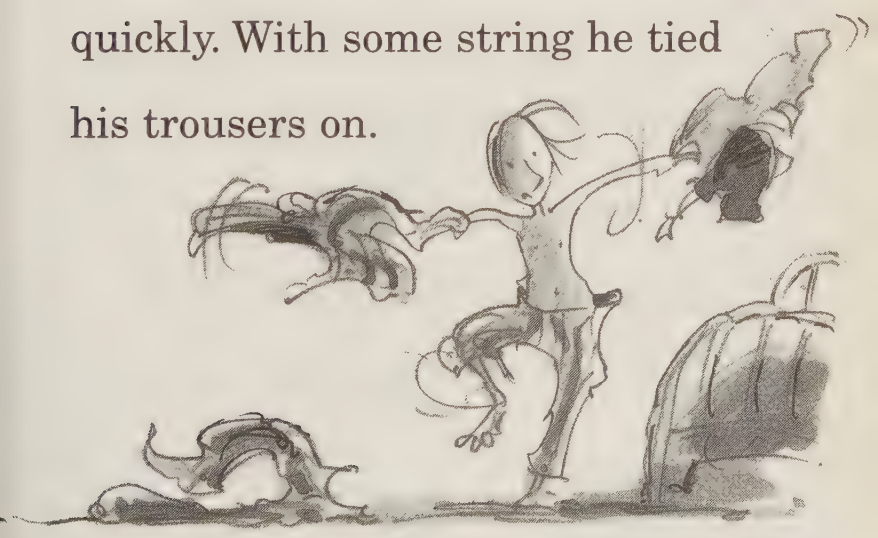
Skeeta went to the window and saw Billy Marbles trying to ride past on his bike. Billy was sliding all over the place, with his knees hanging over the handlebars, and there was Billy's sister, Mavis, walking to school with a big dent in the back of her dress.

Skeeta ran out into the street, holding up his PJs, and right away he saw it. The whole town was the same. No bums!



Chapter 3

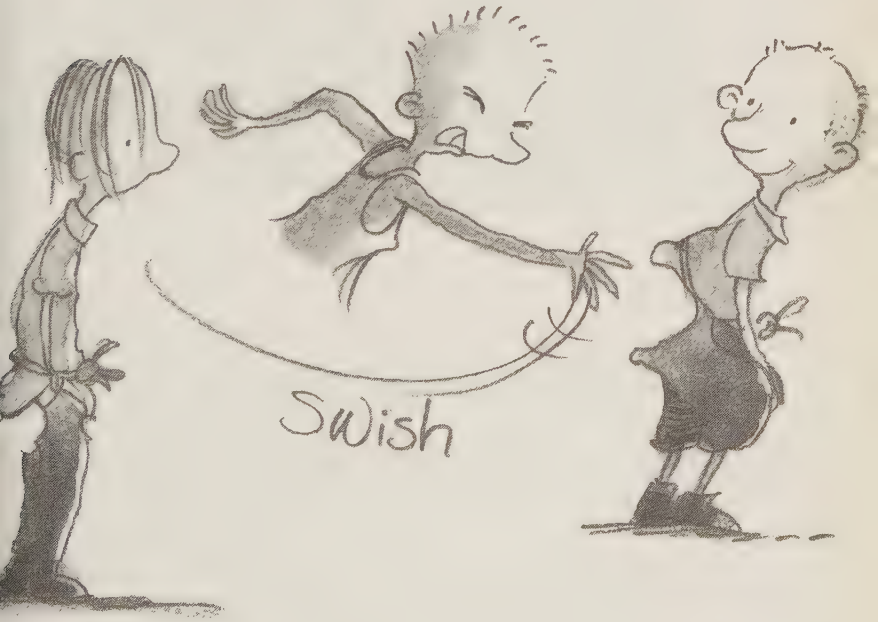
Skeeta ran inside and got dressed quickly. With some string he tied his trousers on.

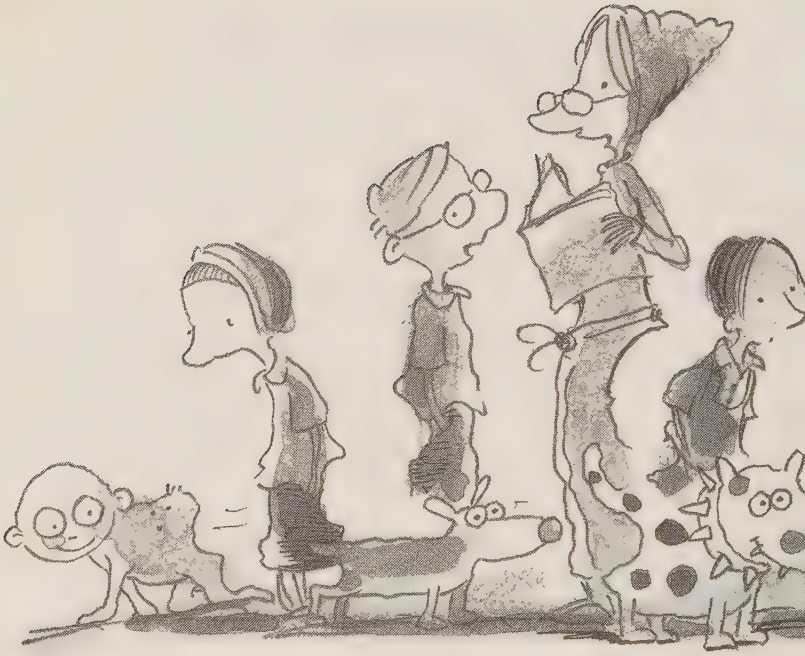


Then he ran to his best mate's house.

Mick Misery, his best mate, was always getting a hiding. Mick's mum was a real smacker. Smacking was her hobby. She walloped Mick for being early, she whacked him for being late.

But this morning she wasn't getting anywhere at all. When Skeeta arrived, Mick's mum was swinging away but every hit just swished past because Mick Misery was *bumless*.





Mrs Misery gave up glumly
and sent them off to school.

Mick whistled like a drunk canary but Skeeta was worried.

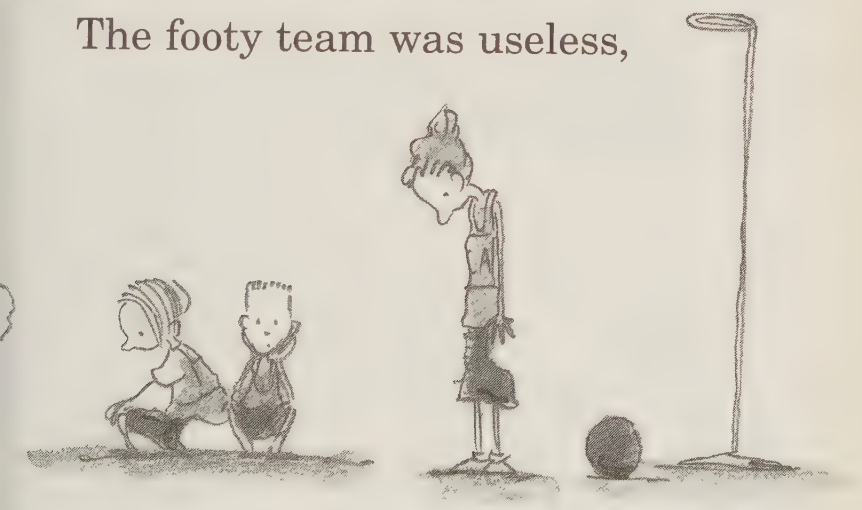
Maybe it's the ozone layer, he thought. Or perhaps we're under attack from aliens. But there had to be an easier answer.

Chapter 4

It was an awful day at school. With nothing to sit on or hold their pants up with, the kids at Bugalugs Primary didn't get time to learn much. At lunch, Billy Marbles couldn't play doogs at all. As any sensible person knows,

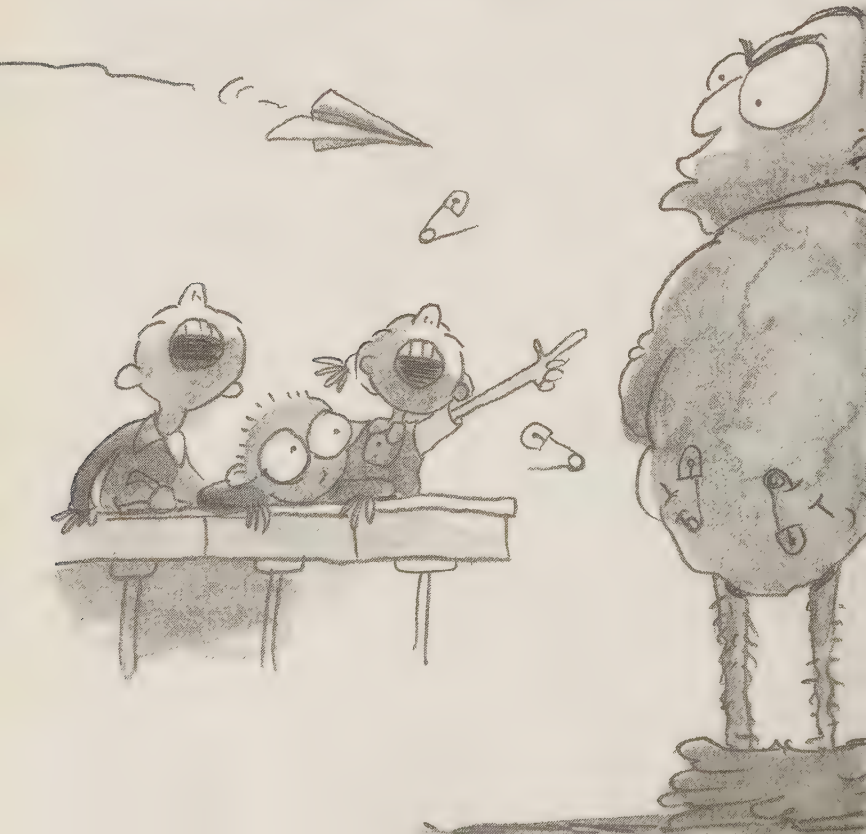
a bum gives you balance and you can't be school marble champ without balance.

The footy team was useless,



the netballers got depressed.

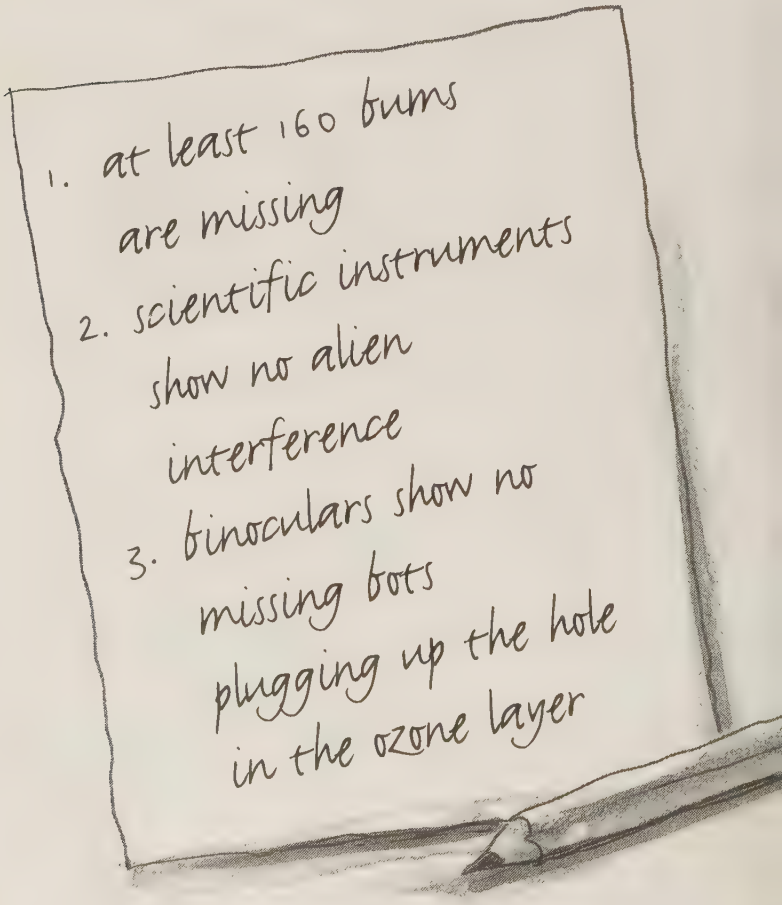
During spelling, Mr Wally's shorts suddenly sprang off their safety pins and went scurrying down his long hairy legs like rats out of a tree. The kids laughed.



They cacked themselves. *And* they all went home with piles of homework so big they needed wheelbarrows to get it all home.

After school, instead of doing his homework, Skeeta Anderson decided to do some detective work. He wrote everything out on a piece of paper.

No one was talking about it all, embarrassed as they were, but it was pretty clear to Skeeta that:



So, he figured: someone must have them. Someone must have burgled them, sneaked into

everyone's bedroom with a torch and a pair of salad tongs and got away with the lot.

But Skeeta was a clever kid,

a bit of a scientist, really. Because,
as any sensible person knows,
you can't hide a townful of bums
very easily. And in a town where

barely anyone has a pair of buttocks to their name, a person getting about still wearing one was definitely SUSPICIOUS.

So Skeeta wired on a pair of running shorts and began to investigate.

Chapter 5

At the Bakery, Hairy Hans was sweeping up, looking sad.

'No one wants buns today, Skeet,' said Hans. 'Not that I can blame them. No doughnuts either.'

Nothing suspicious here.

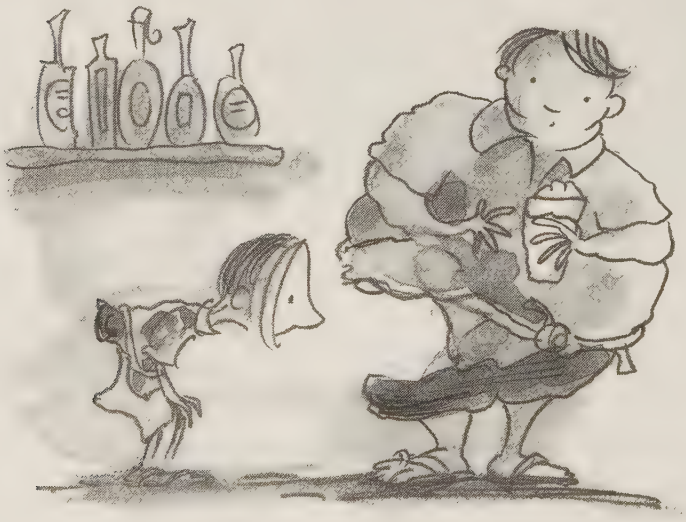
Skeeta went on to Mr Rood the

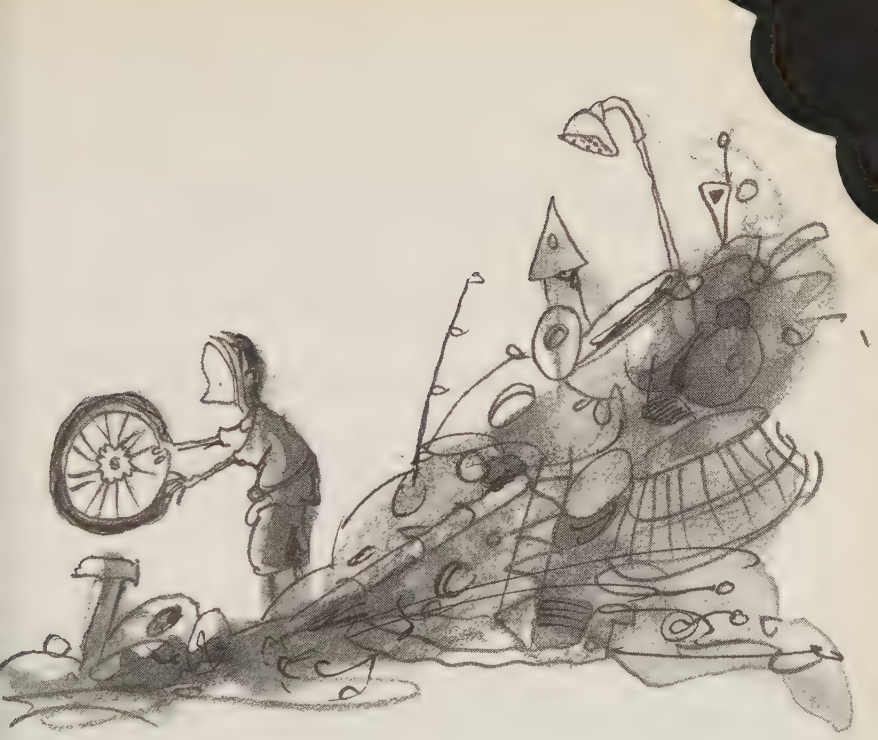
butcher who had a RUMP STEAK SPECIAL sign in his greasy window. That seemed a bit dodgy, today of

all days, so Skeeta sneaked a look in the coolroom while the butcher was serving a customer. Nothing.

Besides, Mr Rood had been burgled same as everyone else.

Nothing at the general store or the petrol station, and Mrs Huge from the pub looked like a meat pie with a bite taken out of it.





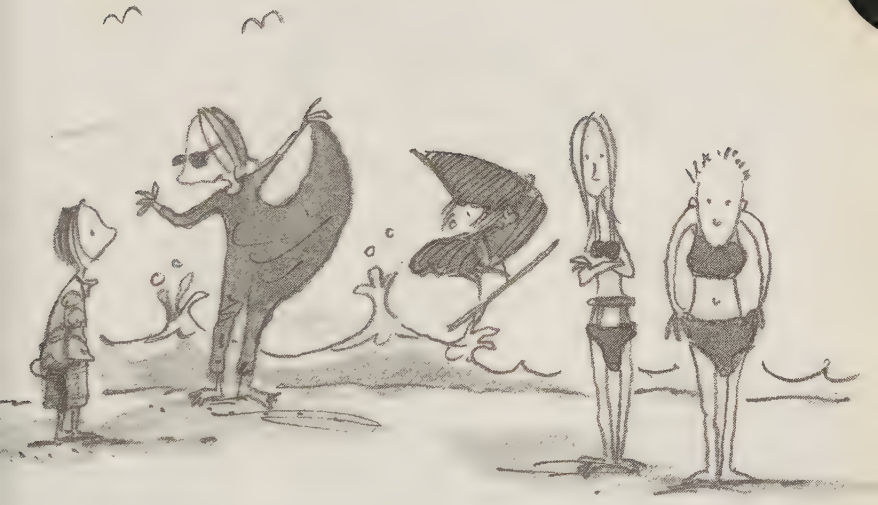
He tried the tip. There was always something useful at the tip, and the price was always right, but no second-hand backsides here today.

In the dunes he saw Mick Misery sliding down slopes, having a great time. Skeeta kept out of sight. Mick was the only

kid in town enjoying not having something in the back of his shorts and Skeeta didn't want to spoil his fun.

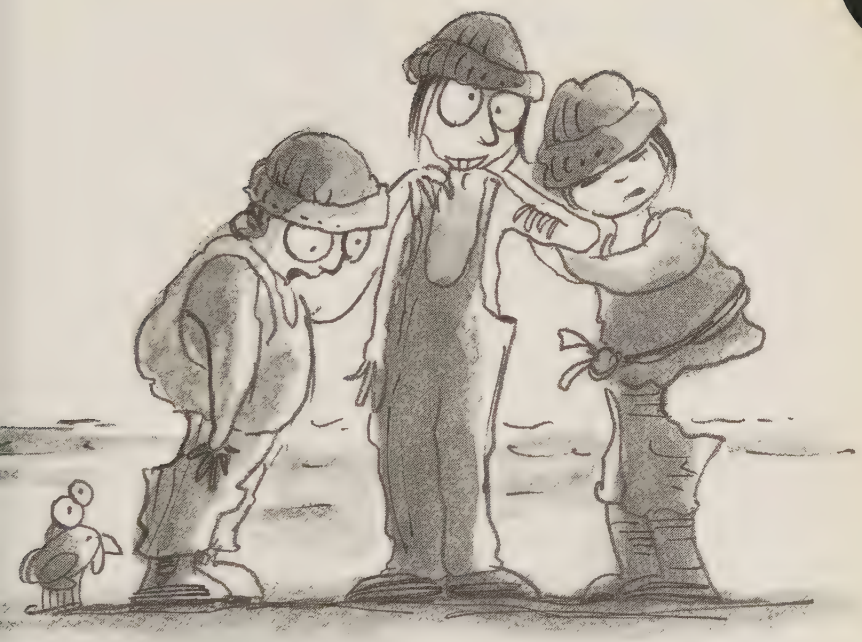
Through the streets of Bugalugs, Skeeta Anderson ran.

Dogs snapped at him but missed by a margin. There was nothing suspicious at all, though the number missing must be about four hundred or more by now, he figured.



Down at the beach, windsurfers complained that their wetsuits were turning into sails, and girls in bikinis had to wear suspenders. The seagulls laughed cruelly.

Skeeta looked at them hard and long, but they didn't look fat enough to be the culprits.



Fishermen stood around looking miserable. They'd all been seasick today and had come in early.

As any good fisherman will tell you, bums equals balance. But someone on the jetty caught Skeeta's eye.

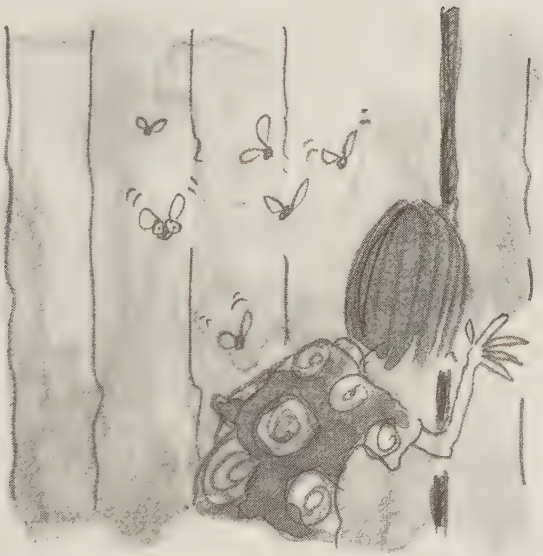
A fisherman, big and gruff-looking, with tattoos on his arms and a belly under his singlet like a beer barrel, walked right past, and Skeeta's hair stood on end.

A-HA! Follow that bum!

Chapter 6

Skeeta followed all the way up the beach and down a sand track which led to a big shed with a truck parked out the front. There was the smell of oil and stinky fish and rotten crays, but also a strange pink smell he couldn't quite name.

The man slid the shed door open and went in. All the big, black greasy blowflies that had been sticking to the door suddenly pounced on Skeeta, who was trying to hide behind the truck.

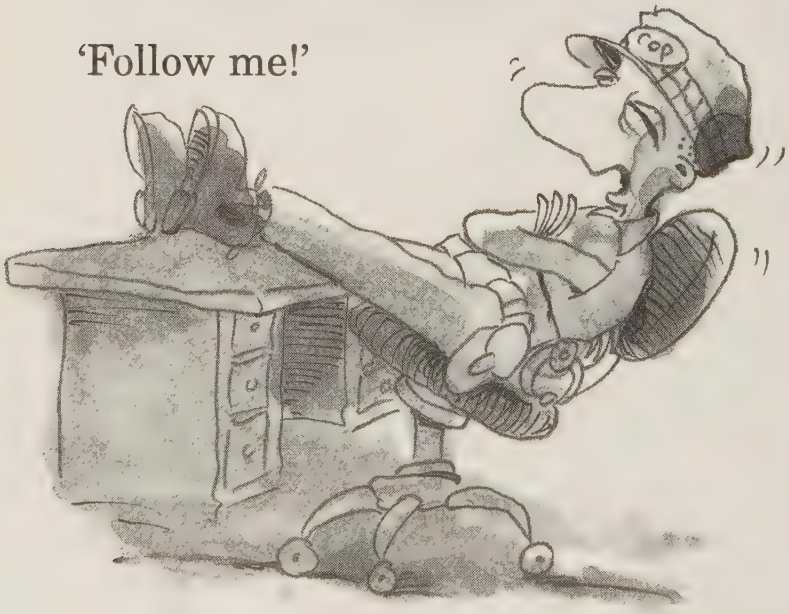


Slowly, Skeeta crept forward until he reached the door and put his eye to a crack. What a sight! He turned and ran like fury.

Constable Coma was asleep as usual when Skeeta came busting into the police station, but he woke quickly.

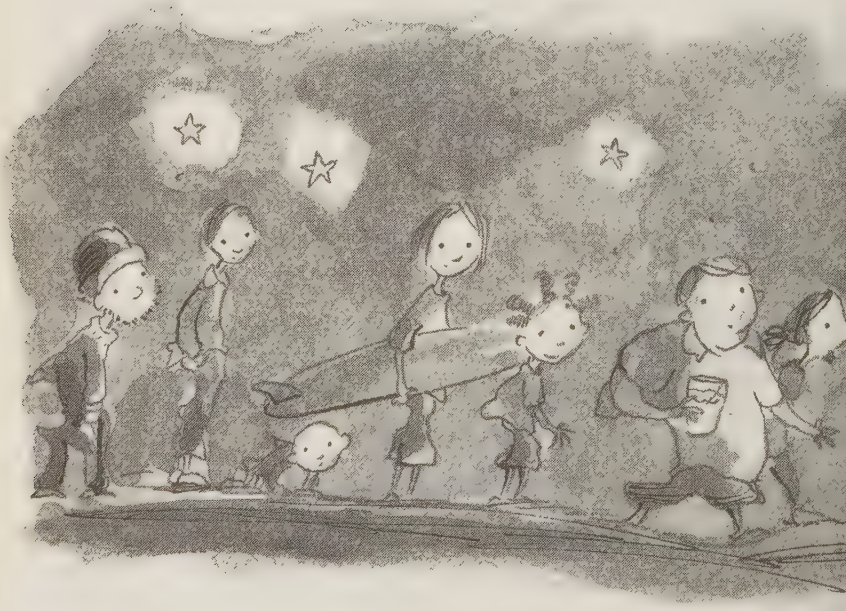
'Strike me pink!' said the constable. 'Someone's stolen me –'

'Everyone's!' said Skeeta. 'Follow me!'



They pounded off to the shed, though not very quickly because Constable Coma kept losing his pants and handcuffs and just about everything else on the way.

People noticed them. It wasn't often they saw the policeman running anywhere, so they followed. Soon the whole town was on their trail.



It was getting dark when they got to the shed – Skeeta, Constable Coma, and the whole population of Bugalugs. There was a light on inside.

Skeeta pulled the door open

and everyone roared.

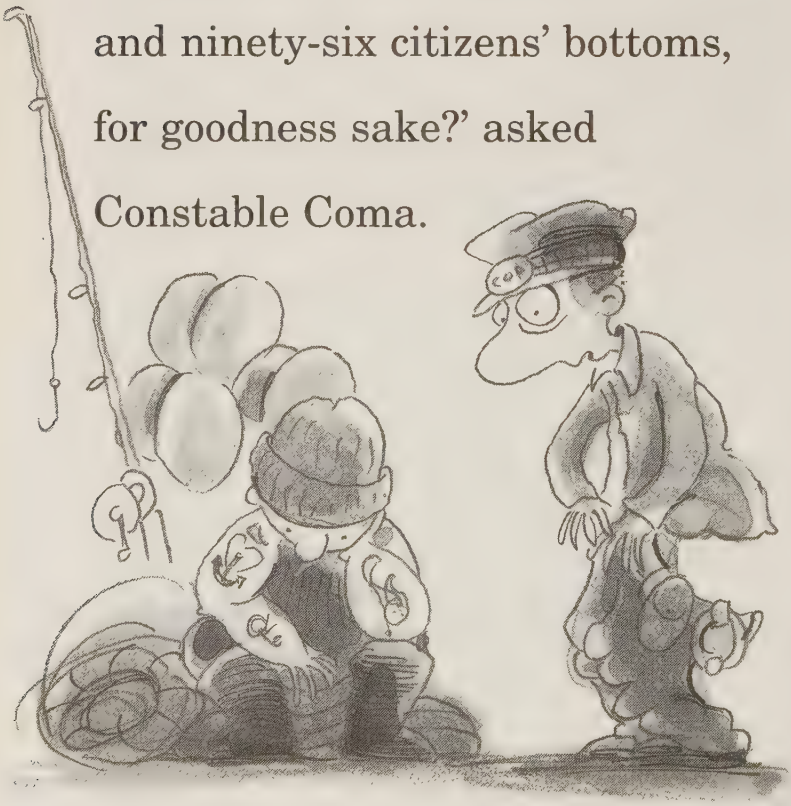
Chapter 7

There it was, a gigantic stockpile of human bums, bottoms, backsides and buttocks reaching almost to the roof. Four hundred and ninety-six units, all still in good condition (though some in better shape than others).

'Blue Murphy!'

The fisherman sat down, looking ashamed.

'Why do you need four hundred and ninety-six citizens' bottoms, for goodness sake?' asked Constable Coma.

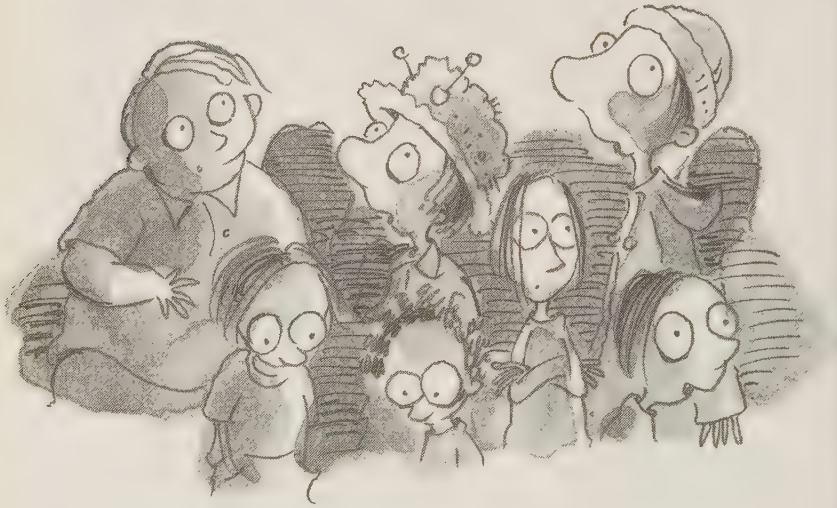


'For bait,' said Skeeta Anderson.

The crowd growled. Constable Coma put the handcuffs on Blue Murphy and lost his pants yet again.

'Righto, everyone can come and claim their own property.'

But the people of Bugalugs hummed and hahed, shuffled their feet. They got all embarrassed.

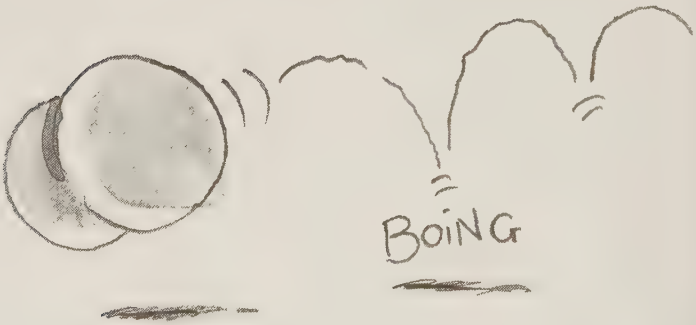


'Someone turn the lights out,' said Skeeta. And when the lights were out everyone went mad. It was like a footy match in there. Hairy Hans liked the feel of a smooth pink one at the bottom of the pile.

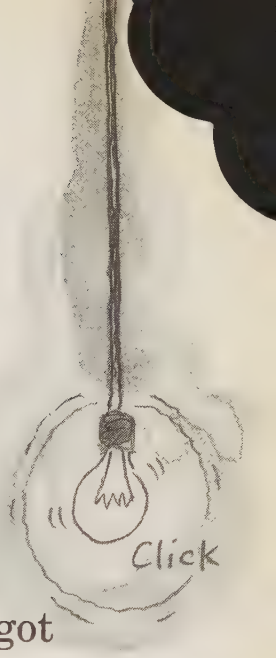
Skeeta's mum (who had a torch) saw one right up high that was small and peachy, and when she climbed up, the pile began to quiver and shake.

Billy Marbles snatched one for himself, and his sister Mavis took *two*. And then all those bottoms came crashing down on the crowd, clunking and bonking like ten tonnes of over-ripe watermelons, shaking the ground,

buckling the walls of the shed,
sending the blowflies out to sea
in a panic, and when someone
finally turned the lights on,
the town nearly died laughing.

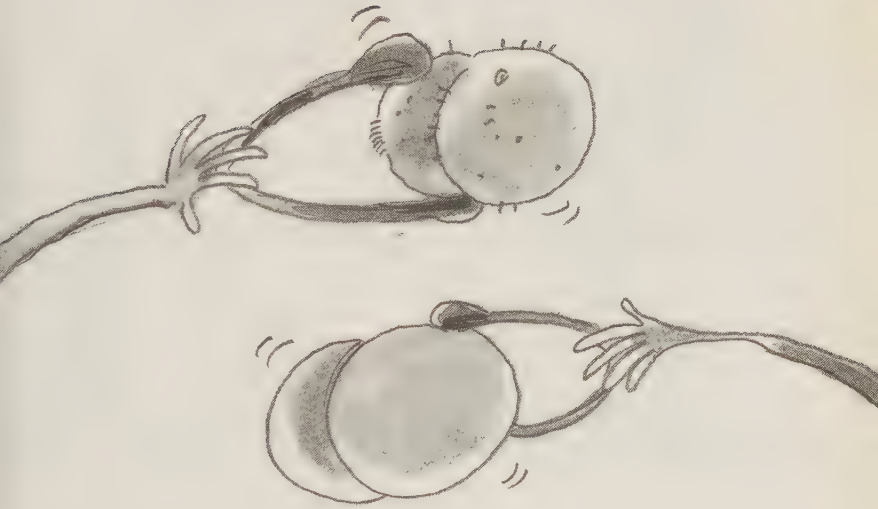


Chapter 8



After that night, Bugalugs got back to normal. Well, almost normal. People looked a bit strange. Because they'd all been too proud to take their own bottoms back, fat people had skinny ones and bald people had

hairy ones. People pretended to be happy with their new choices, but really they were miserable. It was uncomfortable, unhygienic and altogether unsavoury, like wearing someone else's false teeth.



So next Saturday Skeeta organised a swap-meet in the town hall and everyone got their own bum back.

All except Skeeta's best mate, Mick Misery. Mick did a special deal. He bought Blue Murphy's for twenty-five cents and three black marbles.

It was too big for him by far, but it was as hard as a brick and his mum gave up smacking him overnight.

Everyone was grateful to Skeeta Anderson. They bought him rump steak, buns and doughnuts and they always thought of him as the kid who caught the Bugalugs Bum Thief.

From Tim Winton

I used to tell this story to my kids at bedtime. It never helped them sleep but it made them laugh. What a lovely noise it is – the sound of children laughing.

From Stephen Michael King

'Stephen, how would you like to illustrate a Tim Winton?' said the voice on the other end of the phone.

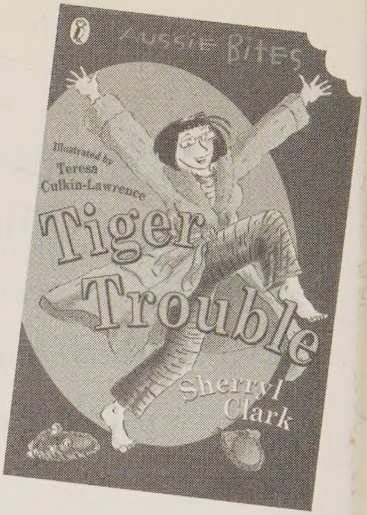
'Wow!' I thought. 'Oceans, moody environments, whales.'

'It's a book about bums,' said the voice.

'Bums,' I said.

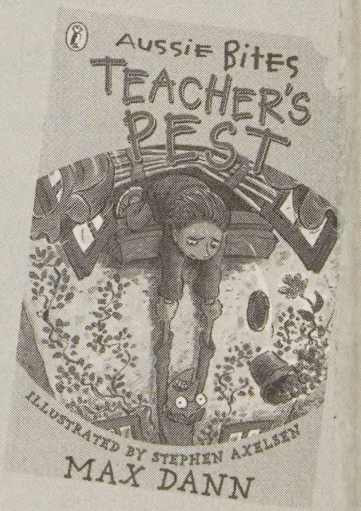
'Yes, bums,' she said . . .

Can Sam, Lin and Jerry save their water-dragons in time?



Eric's mother always gets into trouble. And why is she tap-dancing everywhere?

Can super-smart Serena Smith scare off the fierce Sea Serpent?



Mr Grimwraither is the meanest teacher to have ever screeched his fingernails down the blackboard

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Skeeta Anderson woke up one morning to find that his bum was gone. And not only *his* bum, but the bum of every single person in the town of Bugalugs.

It's up to Skeeta to catch the thief . . .

Young readers will love these mouthwatering, bite-sized stories from their favourite authors and illustrators.

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